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ABSTRACT

Several years ago the East De Pere Board of Education and its superintendent recognized that the key variables of curriculum, enrollments, and facilities were combining to create some serious problems for the district. A systems approach that treats the totality of the problem and analyzes the interrelationships among the parts of the whole was used. A citizen committee and a professional planner developed a series of comprehensive K-12 curriculum recommendations. Accurate computer-generated enrollment projections were obtained by utilizing pre-school census data, a ten-year enrollment history by grade, and district housing development figures. All of the district's facilities were inspected and evaluated to determine if they were durable, functional, and adaptable. The degrees of non-compliance were then recorded for further analysis. A facilities master plan was made that recommended new construction and renovation in light of proposed curriculum changes, reliable enrollment projections, and evaluations of facilities and sites. Detailed educational specifications were developed for the construction of a comprehensive high school. (Author/MLF)

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LONG-RANGE PLANNING: A CASE STUDY

By

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Long-range planning, while commonplace in most successful business and industrial operations today, is still not evident in many school districts throughout the nation. Too often school boards and administrators continue to practice "crisis management," rather than to develop and implement modern, long-range planning strategies.

Despite the rumors about the fast-approaching zero population growth in America, the need for more schools is still so obvious today in many areas that the need for better schools is often eclipsed. Yet, if the problem of better schools is not considered coincident with the problem of enough schools, the latter solution will be temporary indeed. After all, our population is not just expanding; it is changing. And the same applies to knowledge; it is becoming more complex as it is expanding. The adjustments that society makes to meet these changes must be reflected both in our educational programs and the school facilities required to house them. Schools must be planned, designed and built in which the educational programs of tomorrow could conceivably function effectively today.

New teaching concepts and curricula are changing the ideas of school design and construction at a revolutionary pace. School boards and administrators, therefore, can no longer afford to be cognizant only of their immediate school needs in relationship to today's accepted theories of education. They must plan for the future in order to avoid the real possibility of building or renovating schools that may be outgrown, outmoded, or both, within a very short period of time.

EA 009 804

The Setting

Several years ago, the East De Pere Board of Education and its new superintendent, James Trachte, recognized that the key variables of curriculum, enrollments and facilities were combining to create some serious problems for the district. Consequently, the Board authorized a select citizen committee to study these important variables and to formulate some general guidelines for further consideration by school officials. After a number of months of investigation, it was recommended, among other things, that a professional educational planner be commissioned to evaluate the work done to date and to develop a multi-phased plan of action for the East De Pere Public Schools.

PHASE I

A professional planner was engaged and began his assignment by analyzing the citizen committee's recommendations, reviewing all school district curriculum and enrollment data, and making in-depth inspections and evaluations of the existing school facilities and sites. In addition to these activities, personal interviews with the superintendent, building principals, teachers, non-professional staff, citizens and students were also conducted.

Curriculum

While the East De Pere K-12 curriculum program was quite extensive, it was determined to be in need of some upgrading and refining. By employing some of the district's own curriculum studies, previous North Central Association reports, and the input from numerous interviews as well as from the educational planner, a series of comprehensive K-12 curriculum recommendations were soon developed.

Enrollments

Every school district should have accurate and up-to-date information on its present and future student populations. This is essential

because educational decisions in virtually all realms are dependent upon such vital data. Staff employment, student transportation, food service, site acquisition, building programs, and all the accompanying budgetary considerations demand reliable present and future enrollment information. Therefore, utilizing pre-school census data, a ten-year enrollment history by grade, and district housing development figures, accurate computer-generated enrollment projections were obtained for the East De Pere Public Schools.

Facilities

All school buildings should be durable, functional and adaptable. While most American schools are indeed durable, few are truly functional, and still fewer are adaptable. Employing a special rating instrument devised by the educational planner to test these elements, all of the district's facilities and sites were inspected and evaluated. The degrees of non-compliance were then recorded for further analysis.

Outcome

Having collected, organized and analyzed the information and data discussed earlier, the final outcome of Phase I was a Facilities Master Plan for the coming decade and beyond. This plan indicated recommended new construction and renovation in light of proposed curriculum changes, reliable enrollment projections, and evaluations of facilities and sites.

In essence, the final recommendations for East De Pere were the result of a "systems approach" to educational planning. Often, what is done to one building constrains what can be done to another, and a chain reaction occurs. If action is initiated in the absence of a comprehensive plan, the results are frequently short-lived and unsatisfactory. A "systems approach" treats the totality of the problem and analyzes the interrelationships among the parts of the whole. By anticipating chain reactions in advance, those who are responsible for decision-making can

better judge the consequences of their decisions.

PHASE II

Among the thirty-five curriculum and facilities recommendations listed in the Phase I report, was the major recommendation that the East De Pere district build a new high school and convert the present structure into a middle school. After several months of deliberation, the East De Pere Board accepted this recommendation and commissioned Phase II, the development of detailed educational specifications for the construction of a comprehensive high school.

Educational Specifications

Planning, designing and building a school destined to be used into the 21st Century is an awesome responsibility. To provide facilities which are durable, functional, adaptable, and, at the same time, economical, is a challenge to any school district.

Good school facilities are the result of good planning, imaginative designing, and modern building. However, even imaginative designs and modern construction methods cannot produce a truly effective school without thorough planning. Such planning involves the cooperative efforts of school administrators, teachers, non-professional staff, citizens, students and outside educational consultants. The culmination of these efforts will be the development of educational specifications (program requirements) from which a school architect will create the final school drawings.

Working with all of the above-mentioned constituents over a six month period, the planner developed detailed educational specifications for consideration by the East De Pere Board of Education. The document addressed itself to the following areas of concern:

1. Statement of Philosophy
2. Grade or class levels to be accommodated
3. Enrollment capacity expectations

4. Curricular programs and activities
5. Specific utilization plans
6. Instructional procedures
7. Teaching space requirements
8. Specialized instructional facilities
9. Auxiliary areas or facilities
10. Miscellaneous concerns
11. Closing or summary statement

After the educational specifications were approved by the Board, authorization was given for the final activities of Phase III.

PHASE III

When educational specifications have been developed, the next step is the selection of a school architect. From a substantial list of architectural candidates, the planner recommended a manageable number to be invited for personal interview by the East De Pere Board of Education.

Each firm was required to present photographs, floor plans, and total construction time and cost data for high schools they had designed and built in the recent past. They were expected to welcome direct contact with other school districts relative to their overall cooperation and successful completion of high school projects. And East De Pere staff members were authorized to visit some of these school buildings.

After an architectural firm was selected, the educational planner assisted in the clarification of the educational specifications for the architect, acted as intermediary between the staff and architect, and provided liaison between the Board of Education and the architect.

Summary

When a district like East De Pere takes the time, money and effort to commission a long-range plan, has realistic educational specifications developed, and engages a competent school architect, the Public can be assured that the new or renovated facilities will indeed function effectively into the 21st Century and beyond: A Case Study.